DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 430 764 RC 021 995

AUTHOR Howley-Rowe, Caitlin
TITLE Interview Evaluation of Leadership To Unify School Improvement Efforts (LUSIE).
INSTITUTION Appalachia Educational Lab., Charleston, WV.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 1997-12-00
NOTE 19p.
CONTRACT RJ96006001
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; Collegiality; *Educational Change; Educational Cooperation; *Educational Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; *Improvement Programs; *Long Range Planning; Program Evaluation; Self Evaluation (Groups); Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *School Improvement Teams; West Virginia

ABSTRACT

The Leadership to Unify School Improvement Efforts (LUSIE) project worked with school leadership teams from 11 schools in 3 West Virginia county districts to create school plans for improvement. The school leadership teams, a total of 66 people representing a cross-section of each school community, accomplished this at four retreats held in Charleston, West Virginia, in 1996 and 1997. At the fourth retreat, LUSIE participants wrote a guide for other West Virginia schools involved in creating state-required Unified School Improvement Plans. Telephone interviews conducted with 23 participants found that most participants seemed pleased with LUSIE and their resultant school plans, although some expressed skepticism concerning implementation of the plans. Many noted their appreciation of the opportunity to communicate with other educators and people concerned about education. Several respondents said they had developed new competence in communicating and organizing change. The three students interviewed felt the proceedings were irrelevant or ineffective. The evaluation resulted in the following recommendations: integrate students more fully into LUSIE activities; initiate follow-up activities to support schools in the implementation of their plans; and address the concerns of those who noted a disjuncture between theoretical considerations and the practical applications of the work accomplished. Two appendices present the interview protocol and the evaluation standards checklist. (TD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 430 764

Interview Evaluation of Leadership to Unify School Improvement Efforts (LUSIE)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Caitlin Howley-Rowe

Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.
P.O. Box 1348 • Charleston WV 25325 • 800/624-9120

RC021995

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Interview Evaluation of Leadership to Unify School Improvement Efforts (LUSIE)

by

Caitlin Howley-Rowe

December 1997

QUEST Project
Appalachia Educational Laboratory
Post Office Box 1348
Charleston, West Virginia 25325

RC 021995

AEL's mission is to link the knowledge from research with the wisdom from practice to improve teaching and learning. AEL serves as the Regional Educational Laboratory for Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. For these same four states, it operates both a Regional Technology Consortium and the Eisenhower Regional Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education. In addition, it serves as the Region IV Comprehensive Center and operates the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

Information about AEL projects, programs, and services is available by writing or calling AEL.

Appalachia Educational Laboratory
Post Office Box 1348
Charleston, West Virginia 25325-1348
304/347-0400
800/624-9120 (toll-free)
304/347-0487 (FAX)
aelinfo@ael.org
https://www.ael.org

This publication is based on work sponsored wholly or in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education, under contract number RJ96006001. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the Department, or any other agency of the U. S. Government.

AEL is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

METHODOLOGY 3

FINDINGS 4

Participant Understanding of LUSIE 4
School and Personal Change 4
Participant Criticisms 5
Important Insights 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 7

Conclusions 7
Recommendations 8

REFERENCES 9

APPENDICES 10

A: Interview Protocol
B: Completed Evaluation *Standards* Checklist

INTRODUCTION

The Leadership to Unify School Improvement Efforts (LUSIE) project, developed by QUEST staff at the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) and funded by the West Virginia Department of Education, recently completed 14 months of work with the schools in three West Virginia county districts. One team from each of 11 schools in Logan, Marshall, and Raleigh Counties worked together to create school plans for improvement. In addition, participants helped write a document to aid others in West Virginia involved in creating state-required Unified School Improvement Plans (USIPs). A total of 66 people participated in the LUSIE process.

The school leadership teams, consisting of a cross-section of each school community, met at four retreats held in Charleston, West Virginia. The first two retreats, held in August and November 1996, provided participants with an AEL-designed framework for continuous improvement and many techniques for facilitating the development of school visions and goals. Teams then used the techniques in their communities in order to gather data about school and community members' concerns and values. LUSIE participants wrote their draft school improvement plans at the third retreat in April 1997 with such data in mind. During the fourth retreat, held in July 1997, ten LUSIE participants wrote a supplemental guide for other West Virginia schools involved in school improvement efforts, titled *Creating Energy for School Improvement*.

After this document was completed, project staff discussed with one of the two QUEST evaluators ways to gather participants' impressions of the value of their experience with the LUSIE project. Staff were concerned to know how participants understood the process conceptually, as well as how much impact it had on their schools and lives. They were further interested in participant critiques of the LUSIE project.

Consequently, the evaluator and staff decided to conduct a telephone interview several months after *Creating Energy for School Improvement* was completed. The evaluator would conduct the interviews as well as analyze and report the data. These data were intended to inform staff of the ways in which participants found the process useful and meaningful, as well as ways in which LUSIE might be improved. These data would further contribute to staff's ongoing learnings about the inquiry process and efforts toward continuous school improvement.

In addition, this evaluation will serve as a component of the participative assessment that QUEST staff have envisioned. Such an assessment perspective aims to capture data quite different from that generally associated with more quantitative approaches. A participative assessment better apprehends interpersonal and group processes and can more fully solicit respondents' thoughts, dilemmas, and perspectives. In addition, participative assessment is consistent with the framework for continuous improvement that QUEST staff embrace; self-

evaluation, inquiry, reflection, and ongoing assessment require the flexibility that qualitative methods allow.

The audience for this evaluation is QUEST staff. First, this assessment will help staff determine in what ways they might improve the inquiry process. And second, it will enhance staff's learnings and insights about continuous school improvement efforts.

METHODOLOGY

Since face-to-face interviews were not viable in terms of time and resources, QUEST staff and the evaluator chose to conduct telephone interviews of LUSIE participants. This methodological staple for evaluators and social science researchers provides both the structure of a fixed schedule of questions and the flexibility to accomodate new topics the interviewee may introduce to the interaction (Becker & Geer, 1957; Denzin, 1989; Dillman, 1978; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The QUEST evaluator conducted telephone interviews with a sample of 23 LUSIE participants from all of the various role groups and counties involved. These 23 respondents comprised thirty-five percent of the total 66 LUSIE participants. The sample was purposive--interviewees were chosen based on their participation in at least two of the first three LUSIE retreats. Several participants also had attended the fourth meeting, at which the LUSIE document was written. The sample included one assistant superintendent, six principals, three students, one parent, and twelve teachers.

Interviewees were contacted over the course of four days in September 1997. LUSIE participants were reached either at their places of employment or their homes. Parents were most difficult to reach; consequently, only one parent was interviewed. Each interview lasted approximately five to ten minutes. All of the LUSIE participants contacted were willing to be interviewed and to discuss their experiences.

The interview schedule consisted of five questions. QUEST staff and the evaluator constructed the questions together, aiming to gather as much information as possible with minimum inconvenience to respondents. The first question was intended to solicit participants' perceptions of what the LUSIE experience was. In other words, this question was designed to prompt respondents to discuss their notion of LUSIE conceptually. The second question sought to discover if LUSIE had facilitated any change within the participants' schools, while the next question asked if participants' involvement with LUSIE had rendered any personal change. Suggestions for improving the LUSIE project were solicited in the fourth question. Finally, the last question asked respondents to discuss the most important insight they gained from their participation in LUSIE.

FINDINGS

Participant Understanding of LUSIE

The first interview question dealt with participants' conceptions of what constituted the LUSIE project. Nine participants answered this question with a positive evaluation of their LUSIE experience, while one student assessed the LUSIE project as "kinda boring...teachers would like it." The remaining 13 interviewees offered various conceptual accounts of LUSIE. These included notions of LUSIE as "a good opportunity to work with people from other counties to bring in good ideas to make a plan for better schools"; "a way to help schools with problems get their programs better and help them achieve their goals"; "a collaborative effort among parents, teachers, students, and administrators to come up with ways to make schools better"; and "training to help anybody involved in education to (1) understand what USIP is and (2) learn methods to help people to communicate effectively to develop a plan."

Five participants reported that initially they were confused by LUSIE, unsure of its purpose and direction. But all five also said that they eventually felt quite pleased with the work they accomplished during their involvement with the project. Several participants additionally characterized LUSIE as a "learning experience." Another put it this way: "It's hard."

School and Personal Change

The second and third interview questions were designed to ascertain participants' perceptions of the impact LUSIE had in their schools and in their personal lives. Five respondents reported that LUSIE did not effect any personal change. Other participants described a variety of personal changes: LUSIE "made me be more open-minded," "gave me more insight into our needs," "made me more aware of the importance of local schools," "helped me be more involved with what's happening to help my school be a better place," "I now look at education from more than a teacher's view," "made me realize the value of working with other people," "I could never see the whole picture - now I can." One teacher also noted becoming more attuned to the school's goals rather than only her goals for the classroom.

As one interviewee put it, LUSIE ensured that school change happened "intentionally, not accidentally." Many participants noted that LUSIE gave their schools the tools to conduct needs assessments and to produce a school plan collaboratively. As a teacher reported, "I'm not sure our school would have gone that route [assessing needs and setting goals] without LUSIE." One principal even asserted that without LUSIE's assistance, her school "would have been at a loss" when it came to writing an USIP.

One participant noted that LUSIE "opened communications at school [because] the methods [used by LUSIE staff] unified us more." Another reported that the "techniques brought

awareness of how [we] need to involve all [in school planning] rather than [relying on] a mandate from on high." Yet another participant offered that LUSIE generated more teacher self-evaluation in the classroom.

However, five respondents found that little or nothing had changed at their schools as a result of LUSIE. One respondent noted that "in the grand scheme, nothing's changed." Similarly, one teacher said, "I'd like to see us have a unified program, see us move toward these goals. But unfortunately it seems like a ball out of space no one knows what to do with." And two students likewise felt that LUSIE had not contributed to much change in their schools.

Participant Criticisms

The fourth interview question asked participants to share their criticisms of the LUSIE project. Eight respondents said they had no criticisms. Most of the critiques the remaining interviewees offered had to do with the time and scheduling constraints inherent in any off-campus meeting. Some cited wanting more time to communicate with other participants, while others noted the problems associated with, as one respondents put it, trying to "jam so much information into a short time." Another respondent mentioned that the process took such a long time that other teachers "thought I played for a year!" Finally, several participants noted that LUSIE "had a slow start" and that "maybe [we] could have started writing earlier, in November rather than April."

Another criticism was that the meetings held at AEL's offices were too "crammed," that there was not enough room to move about comfortably. Several participants noted that they preferred the time spent at the John XXIII Pastoral Center, a retreat facility, for this reason. A final criticism mentioned by two participants was that LUSIE offered "too much theory, not enough practical application."

Important Insights

The final interview question asked respondents to discuss the most important insight or learning experience they gained from their participation in LUSIE. Two participants answered that LUSIE had enabled them to become more organized and systematic, having learned how to collect data and set goals. As one student put it, "At my clubs, now I can say how we can reach our goals." Relatedly, one principal expressed surprise and pleasure at his teachers' ability to write the school plan.

This principal also described having a new "appreciation for [the] technical awareness of people who aren't in a school and their ability to understand some of the subtleties of our school." Likewise, nine interviewees noted that they had learned from the various other participants with whom they might not have otherwise explored school improvement.

Other learning experiences were more personal. For instance, one principal said, "The Legislature says we have to do something [construct a plan]. It's kinda intimidating. [The LUSIE facilitators] made it seem like something we do anyway, just a matter of doing it and getting it on paper." This principal also very much enjoyed meeting state department employees informally within the LUSIE context: "They took a lot of the fear away. [I thought] 'Oh, they're just like me.'"

The assistant superintendent noted that, through LUSIE, sequential (K-12) community involvement in the local schools developed where before there was none. One teacher responded that LUSIE had changed his perspective: LUSIE "makes you look inward as a teacher," while another teacher offered that the most important learning experience gained from LUSIE was the opportunity to analyze her school and examine areas for improvement more objectively. Finally, one teacher offered that his school was confident that they had produced a worthy USIP because of their participation in LUSIE, while other schools not involved with the project were "scurrying around" to create their own plans.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Most participants appeared to have a basic understanding of the LUSIE project. They understood, for instance, that they were gaining skills and techniques that would help them create a school improvement plan in collaboration with their school's publics. Many other respondents simply said that they enjoyed the experience of participating in LUSIE.

Some interviewees saw no change within their schools as a result of participation in LUSIE. Others expressed concern about the implementation of their school plans. As one participant put it, "We would have a better system, *if we followed the plan*." On the other hand, some participants cited increased focus on school improvement, better organization within their schools, and greater inclusion of the wider school community. Others simply stated that their schools now have a plan as a result of LUSIE. Only two participants were able to cite specific changes that had thus far been instituted in their schools.

In terms of personal changes resulting from participation in LUSIE, some interviewees mentioned their increased self-awareness and self-evaluation, as well as their improved receptiveness to others' perceptions. Several respondents felt that their involvement in LUSIE had generated no personal changes.

Most participants had no serious critiques of LUSIE. They were pleased with the process and felt their work had been productive. As an aside, some noted that they had hoped for more time to be allotted for interactions with colleagues, but acknowledged that this was a problem commonly associated with many meetings. Others mentioned difficulties with scheduling they had encountered, but these respondents also felt that such problems were inevitable.

Other concerns, however, were more specific. More space in which to move around would have been helpful to some participants. Another felt that the group could have begun writing plans earlier in the process. Additionally, a few respondents were concerned about how, and even if, their school improvement plans would be implemented.

Finally, many participants reported that one of the most important learning experiences they had as a result of their involvement in LUSIE was an increased awareness of the larger school community. Several respondents also noted that they had discovered or developed new competence in communicating and organizing change.

The principals and administrator were quite pleased with LUSIE. Teachers, too, enjoyed the process and found it useful. They often noted how much they appreciated the opportunity to communicate with other educators and people concerned about education, as well as the time to reflect on their work. One student found the experience boring, while the remaining two students

interviewed saw little or no change in their schools following LUSIE. The one parent interviewed found LUSIE to be fruitful and productive.

In sum, most participants seemed pleased with LUSIE and their resultant school plans, although some noted their initial skepticism. Further, most respondents enjoyed meeting other people concerned about education to discuss school improvement.

Recommendations

Based on the information gathered from the telephone interviews of a sample of 23 LUSIE participants, the following recommendations are made.

First, students could be integrated more fully into LUSIE activities. The students interviewed all indicated that on some level they found the proceedings irrelevant or ineffective.

Second, educators described concern about the actual implementation of their school improvement plans. Perhaps follow-up activities could be undertaken to support schools as they attempt to institute some of the changes suggested in their plans.

Third, facilitators perhaps could address the concerns of those who noted a disjuncture between theoretical considerations and the practical applications of the work accomplished as a result of the LUSIE project.

REFERENCES

Appalachia Educational Laboratory. (1997). *Creating energy for school improvement.* Charleston, WV: Author.

Becker, H. S., & Geer, B. (1957). Participant observation and interviewing: A comparison. *Human Organization, 16*: 28-32.

Denzin, N. K. (1989). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Dillman, D. A. (1978). *Mail and telephone surveys: The total design method.* New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. B. (1994). *Qualitative Data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Hello. This is Caitlin Howley-Rowe from Appalachia Educational Laboratory. May I please speak to _____?

Hello. I'm Caitlin Howley-Rowe from Appalachia Educational Laboratory. I'm the third-party evaluator for the LUSIE project that you participated in, and I'm calling to ask you a few questions about your experiences with the project. You may have read in a recent letter from Beth Sattes that I would be calling you.

I want to assure you that your name will not be associated with any of your comments, and anything you tell me will be used for our own learning as we try to improve this project. Also, this interview ought to take only 10 minutes or so.

Is now a good time for you talk with me?

(If yes, continue)

Date:
Time:
Role group:

1. How would you describe the LUSIE project to someone who had never encountered it before?

2. In what ways, if any, did involvement with LUSIE change the way things are done at your school?

3. In what ways, if any, did your experience with LUSIE change you personally?

4. What criticisms, if any, of the LUSIE project do you have?

5. What was the most important insight or learning experience you gained from your involvement in LUSIE?

APPENDIX B:

Completed Evaluation *Standards* Checklist

Citation Form

The Program Evaluation Standards (1994, Sage) guided the development of this (check one):

____ request for evaluation plan/design/proposal
____ evaluation plan/design/proposal
____ evaluation contract
__X__ evaluation report
____ other: _____

To interpret the information provided on this form, the reader needs to refer to the full text of the standards as they appear in Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, *The Program Evaluation Standards* (1994), Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

The *Standards* were consulted and used as indicated in the table below (check as appropriate):

Descriptor		The Standard was deemed applicable and to the extent feasible was taken into account.	The Standard was deemed applicable but could not be taken into account.	The Standard was not deemed applicable.	Exception was taken to the Standard.
U1	Stakeholder Identification	X			
U2	Evaluator Credibility	X			
U3	Information Scope and Selection	X			
U4	Values Identification	X			
U5	Report Clarity	X			
U6	Report Timeliness and Dissemination	X			
U7	Evaluation Impact	X			
F1	Practical Procedures	X			
F2	Political Viability			X	
F3	Cost Effectiveness	X			
P1	Service Orientation	X			
P2	Formal Agreements			X	
P3	Rights of Human Subjects	X			
P4	Human Interactions	X			
P5	Complete and Fair Assessment	X			
P6	Disclosure of Findings	X			
P7	Conflict of Interest	X			
P8	Fiscal Responsibility	X			
A1	Program Documentation	X			
A2	Context Analysis	X			
A3	Described Purposes and Procedures	X			
A4	Defensible Information Sources	X			
A5	Valid Information	X			
A6	Reliable Information	X			
A7	Systematic Information	X			
A8	Analysis of Quantitative Information			X	
A9	Analysis of Qualitative Information	X			
A10	Justified Conclusions	X			
A11	Impartial Reporting	X			
A12	Metaevaluation	X			

Name (typed) Caitlin Howley-Rowe Date: 1/14/98

(signature) Caitlin Howley-Rowe

Position or Title: Research Assistant

Agency: Appalachia Educational Laboratory

Address: 1031 Quarrier St., P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325

Relation to Document: Author

(e.g., author of document, evaluation team leader, external auditor, internal auditor)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE